



their groove back



years since the release of the Stuffies' debut album *The Eight Legged Groove Machine* and despite all the water, much of it troubled, which had passed under the bridge, Miles and Malc decided it was cause for celebration. "I happened to go see a couple of Mission gigs in London where they played an album in its entirety," he

says. "There was something nice about knowing what song is going to come next and it just seemed right to perform the Groove Machine in the same way." Two sell-out shows in London and Birmingham followed. Fans couldn't get enough and, ever eager to please, the band booked a series of further gigs,

including the Leeds O2 Academy where they will take to the stage next week.

"There was only one slight problem," says Miles. "The album lasts about 40 minutes and live, when you play everything quicker, we could be all done and dusted in about half an hour. Given the ticket prices promoters want to charge, that didn't quite stack up, so there is an hour-long encore and some other songs padding it out."

In between The Wonder Stuff gigs, Miles continues to do the acoustic rounds with Erica.

"Now is probably the happiest time of my life," he says. "The band all get on, I'm eager and keener to perform than ever."

"In 1987 we'd turn up in somewhere like Tamworth and the first thing we did was go straight to the bar. By 9pm I'd be absolutely leathered. By half past I was almost unable to play. These days I can keep things under control until after a gig. That's not quite true, about 40 minutes in I'm quietly toasted, but there's none of the chaos. I guess me and Malc have grown up a bit. We've learnt to smell the roses more often than we used to."

Still regularly touring America with Erica, who joined the band after she was spotted busking in Stratford-upon-Avon, he did for a brief moment consider moving to the States. However, while the Miles of old may have mellowed a little, he hasn't quite been able to fully embrace Stateside optimism.

"When I first went to New Jersey I had this romantic notion of throwing a guitar on my back, travelling around on a Greyhound bus and getting gigs where I could. It didn't quite work out like that, but the audiences

out there have been good to me," he says.

"If you say I'm going to do a couple of new songs they get genuinely excited whereas British audiences tend to give you a look which says: 'Can't we just stick to the old stuff'."

"It's nice to have a bit of positivity occasionally, but I could never live out there permanently. I need a bit of cynicism in my life."

Dovetailing The Wonder Stuff with his solo projects may not have come easy, and he admits that occasionally he is quietly amazed that he managed to pull it off at all.

"I always had a certain arrogance about music," he says. "But now 20 years on, I do think: 'God, I'm actually here still doing it'."

"There have been plenty of times over the years when things didn't look good, but it was more just a case of: 'Right, I'd better sit down and write some more songs'."

"It has been a privilege to look down at the audience and see them change from girls in stripy tights and guys with long hair to a crowd like the band, in their 40s with larger waistlines. We've all come a long way together."

Planning ahead is not something Miles spends much time worrying about, and for the moment at least he's more than happy to appreciate the status quo.

"This is the most stable line-up The Wonder Stuff has ever had," he says. "I don't like saying that too loudly as I fear it may be some kind of jinx, but whatever happens I guess I'll always be making music somewhere."

■ **The Wonder Stuff's *Eight Legged Groove Machine* anniversary tour, Leeds O2 Academy, May 15. Miles and Erica play Bar 1:22 on May 7 and the Keighley Krawl on Jun 7.**

Weekend proves music centre's jazz credentials

JAZZ PREVIEW

Reginald Brace

Jazz weekends at the National Centre for Early Music in York are noted for being oases of contrast and surprise and the three-day event which begins tonight is no exception.

Simon Spillett, a full throttle tenor player in the mould of the revered Tubby Hayes, opens the programme at the helm of a quartet completed by John Critchinson on

piano, Andrew Cleyndert on bass and Spike Wells on drums.

Burden of Paradise, tomorrow night is a beguiling group fronted by Snake Davis, a monarch among soul saxophonists, and singer Helen Watson, who makes an ideal cohort in material which dips into diverse sources but never loses heat or conviction.

Julian Joseph – pianist, bandleader, composer and spokesman for jazz – has the NCEM's peerless

acoustics to himself on Sunday with a solo performance which precedes Re: Impressions, featuring members of the University of York's jazz orchestra plus contributions on trombone from the irrepressible Dennis Rollins.

Empirical, re-formed after the departure of Jay Phelps and Kit Downes, with vibes player Lewis Wright now in the line-up, salute the music of Eric Dolphy for Wakefield Jazz tonight.

Meanwhile the club is

understandably pleased to have been nominated for jazz venue of the year in the 2009 Parliamentary Jazz Awards.

There are four other nominees in the category and the results will be announced at a ceremony at the House of Commons, hosted by broadcaster Paul Gambaccini, on May 20.

Wakefield Jazz won the award in 2005.

■ **For more information about the National Centre for Early Music, log on to www.ncem.co.uk**

ALBUM REVIEWS

Jonathan Telfer (rock/pop), **Andrew Vine** (Jazz),
and David Denton (classical/opera)



The Maccabees: *Wall of Arms* (Polydor, 2701102) £10.76

Perhaps reflecting the mood of the times, and certainly chastened by wranglings within the band, indie funsters The Maccabees are in more sober mood on *Wall of Arms* than their 2007 debut *Colour It In*. There is less self-conscious novelty in their approach, and disparity between the album's highs (the swaggering band showcase *Can You Give It*) and low (the missable *Dinosaurs*). Orlando Weeks's lyrics are still their strongest selling point, relishing Morrissey-lite epithets that are less throwaway now he's taking a more serious approach. **JT**



The Horrors: *Primary Colours* (XL, XLCD418) £11.74

Like The Maccabees, Essex garage goths The Horrors take an abrupt change of direction after failing to quite match the hype with their 2007 debut, and deliver one of the most surprisingly good, albums of the year. Riding the crest of their impeccable influences without lapsing into pastiche, *Primary Colours* steals the best bits from My Bloody Valentine, Jesus and Mary Chain, The Cramps, VU and Loop, bolts on a krautrock rhythm, and somehow ends up sounding fresh. The Horrors are staring into an unexpectedly bright future. **JT**



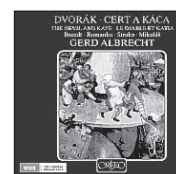
Susia Arioli: *Night Lights* (World Village) £13.70

Arioli is a Canadian singer whose reputation has steadily increased over the past few years. She's a cool interpreter of classics, and this CD is richly enjoyable. She doesn't have a big voice, but has a subtly effective way with a lyric. She makes a fine job of such standards as *Can't We Be Friends*, *The Very Thought of You* and *You Go to My Head*. One of the joys of the record is Arioli's partnership with guitarist Jordan Officer, whose playing has a mellow warmth and complements the vocals beautifully. **AV**



Archie Shepp: *Phat Jam in Milano* (Archieball) £13.70

The old '60s radical was turning 70 when this live session was recorded two years ago, and it demonstrates that the passion and political polemic that always informed his work remains undimmed. It's jazz that often seethes with indignation as rapper Napoleon Maddox fulminates against the state of the US under George W Bush. In truth, the rap gets too much space, and the musical interest goes up when Shepp digs in for some bustling solos. Overall, it's a mixed bag, but Shepp can't be faulted for his determination to push in new directions. **AV**



Dvorak: *Kate and the Devil* (Orfeo C777 082H (2CDs)) £29.35

Even the Devil cannot endure the shrewish Kate, but at least her temporary journey to hell in his company has a happy ending when he frees the serfs from the overbearing Princess. Dvorak's light comedy could hardly expect a finer cast. Michelle Breedt's fruity voice makes a believable Kate, Olga Romanko a gorgeous Furstin, and long-time favourite Czech bass, Peter Mikulas, is a suitably sinister Devil. Add the fabulous West German Radio Orchestra, under Gerd Albrecht, and you have a surefire winner. **DD**



Ireland: *Piano Trios / Music for violin and piano* (Naxos 8. 570507) £5.86

Insecure and overly self-critical, John Ireland left us with all too little, though in his Piano Trios we have three masterpieces of the 20th century. Quintessentially English, they are filled with instantly attractive thematic material, the long sweeping phrases of the Phantasie Trio here played with unbridled passion. Sheffield-born pianist, Benjamin Frith, is at the helm of the Gould Piano Trio which radiates the warmth and spontaneity on which the music thrives, Gould and Frith adding four salon pieces including *The Holy Boy*. **DD**

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